

Volunteer Emergency-Worker's Survivors Pension

The Volunteer Emergency-Worker's Survivors Pension (VESP) was established by Chapter 134, P.L. 2002, and provides a survivors pension, paid by the State and administered by the Division of Pensions and Benefits, for certain volunteer emergency workers who are killed in the performance of their volunteer duties. This fact sheet describes the VESP benefit, outlines the notification process for municipalities, and includes information for potential recipients.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE VESP?

Survivors (dependents) of a volunteer firefighter, first aid worker, rescue squad worker, or emergency medical technician who was killed while performing volunteer duties during an emergency (including during travel to and from the emergency site) on or after January 1, 2000 may be eligible for a VESP. The volunteer must have been a member of a duly incorporated voluntary fire company, first aid and emergency or ambulance or rescue squad. Eligible survivors include:

- The widow or widower;
- Unmarried children (if there is no widow or widower) (a) under the age of 18; (b) age 18 years of age or older while enrolled in a secondary school; (c) under the age of 24 and enrolled in a degree program at an institution of higher education for at least 12 credit hours each semester; or (d) disabled child at any age who is incapable of self-support due to the disability;
- Dependent parents (if there is no widow, widower, or eligible dependent children) who received at least half of their support from the emergency worker during the twelve months preceding the death.

NOTE: If a survivor is also eligible for a monthly pension benefit due to the voluntary emergency worker's membership in the PERS, PFRS, or SPRS on the basis of other employment, that survivor is not also eligible for the VESP.

HOW DOES AN ELIGIBLE SURVIVOR GET THE VESP BENEFIT?

The municipality being served by the volunteer emergency worker at the time of death is authorized by Chapter 134 to extend a VESP to eligible survivors of that worker. If the governing body of the municipality decides to offer the VESP, it must adopt a resolution certifying the eligibility of the survivor(s) and submit it to the Division of Pensions and Benefits within ten days of adoption. The municipality will be required to forward a certified *Application for VESP Benefits* to the Division along with the supporting documentation needed to ensure the eligibility of the survivor(s) for the VESP. This would include the accident or police report and the death certificate, and other documents such as the marriage certificate, birth certificates of children, school enrollment records, etc., as appropriate.

WHAT IS THE VESP BENEFIT AND WHEN WILL IT START?

For survivors of an emergency worker who died in 2000, 2001, 2002, or 2003, the VESP became payable in January 2004. For survivors of an emergency worker who dies in 2004 or later, the VESP for an eligible survivor begins in the January of the calendar year following the volunteer emergency worker's death. The annual amount of the benefit, which is exempt from federal income tax, is paid monthly by the Division of Pensions and Benefits, and is as follows:

ELIGIBLE SURVIVOR ANNUAL VESP BENEFIT

- Widow or Widower (with or without dependent children) — \$15,000
- Dependent children (with no surviving widow or widower or after the death of a surviving widow or widower) — \$15,000 split equally between the eligible children.
- Dependent children (after surviving widow or widower remarries) — \$10,000 split equally between the eligible children.

- Dependent parent or parents (with no surviving widow, widower, or dependent children).
\$5,000

WHEN WILL THE VESP BENEFIT END?

The VESP benefit for a widow or widower will end when that survivor remarries or dies. If that widow or widower has a dependent child or children who also qualified as surviving dependents, then that child or children will be eligible to receive a VESP benefit.

The VESP benefit for a dependent child will end when the child dies, marries, reaches the age limit, no longer meets the education criteria for eligibility, or is no longer deemed disabled and incapable of self-support.

The VESP benefit for a dependent parent will end when that survivor remarries or dies.

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